

Pan-African Youth Leadership Program

Remarks of Ambassador Shari Villarosa

March 4, 2014

Good afternoon.

I am pleased to introduce the four Mauritians – three students and one adult mentor – who will attend the 2014 Pan-African Youth Leadership Program in the United States later this month.

These four are the best of the best, selected from 120 applicants! The quality and quantity of the applications made the selection process very competitive.

We were impressed by the overall skills of all the candidates we interviewed, but these four clearly stood out.

The three student ambassadors we will send to the United States of America are Selvina Mootien of Dr. Maurice Curé State College, Dimitri Fleuriot of Collège du Saint Esprit and Carméla Fortuno of Loreto College of Rose Hill. They will be accompanied by Ms. Roshnee Rajkomar, Chemistry teacher at Adventist College, our adult mentor. She is one of only four adult mentors who were chosen for the program from across Africa.

Our three student representatives stood out for their wide variety of social and academic interests, their leadership at school and in their communities, and for their strong interest in making a difference in the future of their country. For example:

Selvina takes a keen interest in karate, classical and modern dance, who has dreams of becoming a doctor, pilot or engineer. She has been elected to the student council of her

school and she helps fellow students who have difficulties with math. Selvina wants to get involved in eliminating domestic violence and helping its many victims in Mauritius to recover. She would like to start a project helping women and child victims engage in sports and other healthy activities as a means to overcome their trauma and help them build their confidence. I expect that she will learn a great deal in the United States and we look forward to working with her on her return to eliminate this scourge from Mauritius.

Dimitri's interests focus more on information technology with plans to continue his studies in computer science. He was president of his school's Computer Club and in his free time he acts as a DJ mixing house music on his computer. Last year, he co-organized a fund-raising event for flood victims, and he was vice president of the Rise Against Club, which focuses on difficult issues in society, including AIDS, racial discrimination and cancer. Dimitri would like to use innovative technology in the educational system in Mauritius to create a platform to develop values such as democracy and philanthropy in his community.

Carmela is an active athlete, who takes an avid interest in environmental and charity projects for her community, and hopes to become a speech therapist. Her particular area of interest is to work with disabled children, particularly children who suffer from autism. She has noted the lack of information on autism in Mauritius so she plans to develop a campaign to inform people about the disability and help those who suffer from it.

Our adult mentor, Ms. Rajkomar, convinced our interview panel that she was the best candidate because of her dedication to her students. She founded a Science Club at her school and organizes regular activities for students' personal growth. She is a supervising teacher for students in National Science competitions, and encourages them to focus on promoting sustainable development. For the past ten years, she has been writing scripts for dramas and she also acts on stage for drama festivals. As mentor, we hope that she will help teach the three students to lead, both during their time in the US and upon their return

to Mauritius, and encourage other students to step forward as leaders in their communities.

The Pan-Africa Youth Leadership Program is an exchange program through which the U.S. Government hopes to nurture young leaders and foster regional cooperation across Africa. This year approximately 144 youth and adult participants in total will travel to the United States in six separate, mixed-country delegations in the spring and summer.

Selvina, Carméla, Dimitri and Mrs. Rajkomar will join 19 of their peers from 7 other countries --- Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda --- in the United States for a 3-week program, from March 22 – April 12 visiting Washington, DC; Chicago, Illinois; and Portland, Oregon. In the later two cities, they will stay in the homes of American families to get to know our country more personally.

The program includes a comprehensive overview of U.S. history and culture, as well as many core leadership development facets, including:

- A 4-day segment in Washington, DC to learn about U.S. history, culture and the U.S. system of democratic governance, civic rights and responsibilities in the U.S.
- Leadership training which will focus on goal-setting, conflict resolution and negotiation, communication and presentation skills.
- Site-visits, cultural and volunteer activities, and speaking engagements which will provide hands-on learning opportunities for skills application and networking.
- The participants will begin developing action plans for their community-based initiatives in Chicago.
- In Portland, the students will meet with local youth leaders, attend workshops on entrepreneurship and civic engagement, and participate in service projects. They will finalize planning Social Impact Projects that they will implement in their home communities.

We believe that this three week program will provide Selvina, Dimitri, Carméla and Mrs. Rajkomar with clear plans of how they can implement change in Mauritius.

Upon their return, we will link them with the Mentoring Partnership for Young African Leaders and alumni of African Leadership Academy. As our alumni, they will also have access to seed funding to kick-off their initiative and support for developing small grant applications from other sources.

The United States feels that investing in the next generation of African leaders is critical to ensuring the success of Africa. One in three Africans is between the ages of 10 and 24, and approximately 60 percent of Africa's total population is below the age of 35. Through exchanges like the Pan-African Youth Leadership Program and the Young African Leadership Initiative (or YALI), the United States is investing in the next generation of African leaders, committing significant resources to enhance leadership skills, bolster entrepreneurship and social engagement, and connect young African leaders with one another, with the United States, and with the American people.

Selvina, Dimitri, Carméla and Mrs. Rajkomar – You are the first four Mauritian ambassadors that we are sending on the Pan-African Youth Leadership Program. I know that you will make Mauritius proud in the United States. I certainly look forward to learning about your trip and your action plans when you return. You are the future and we believe in you!